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Technical Report

Wetland Flora



No. 99-7 / July 1999

Gene Silberhorn

Partridge Pea

Chamaecrista fasciculata (Michx.) Greene
Synonym *Cassia fasciculata* Michx.

Growth Habit and Diagnostic Characteristics

Partridge pea is an erect, branched, annual herb, with yellow flowers (3/4 to 1 in. wide), pinnately compound leaves, that often forms dense thickets. This plant, a member of the pea (Fabaceae) family, produces legume pods, characteristic of this family. The pods usually contain 8 to 15 hard seeds ("peas"), are green in late summer/early fall, eventually turning dark brown and releasing seeds by late autumn/early winter. Plants are profuse with legumes late in the season. The 10 to 15 paired leaflets on each of the compound leaves are sensitive to rough handling and often fold up when disturbed. Stipules (narrow leaf-like appendages at the base of the petioles) are present throughout the growing season. The bright yellow flowers start blooming in early July, peaking in August, and often continue to bloom until early November in coastal Virginia.

Distribution

Chamaecrista fasciculata is widely distributed throughout eastern United States.

Habitat

Partridge pea grows in a wide array of conditions. It is most often found along roadsides, abandoned fields and in dry disturbed areas. In coastal Virginia, however, it can also be found in saturated conditions along the edges of ponds, marshes and created or disturbed wetlands.

Ecological Value/Benefits

Seeds from this plant are eaten by upland game birds such as quail and, when found at the edge of wetlands, the seeds are a likely food for shore birds and waterfowl.

Wetland Indicator Status

According to the *Draft Revision of the National List of Plant Species that Occur in Wetlands, 1997*, *Chamaecrista fasciculata* is classified as a **facultative upland plant (FACU)**. FACUs "usually occur in non-wetlands (estimated probability 67%-99%), but occasionally found in wetlands (estimated probability 1%-33%)."

Chamaecrista fasciculata (Michx.) Greene
Synonym *Cassia fasciculata* Michx.



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